

**Testimony to the Elementary & Secondary Education Sub-Committee of the Appropriations Committee  
Governor's Budget Proposal – SDE  
In Support of Funding for Youth Service Bureaus  
Submitted by Jaimee Eldred, Coordinator for the Torrington LIST (Local Interagency Service Team)  
and Thomas Donaldson, Director of the Torrington Area Youth Service Bureau, Inc.  
February 16, 2017**

**Dear Representative Walker, Senator Osten, Senator Formica and members of the Appropriations Committee:**

My name is Jaimee Eldred and I coordinate the LIST for the Torrington Court region, one of many services that are provided by the Torrington Area Youth Service Bureau. I am writing today in support of keeping Youth Service Bureaus around the state (currently 102) fully funded as budget proceedings continue. As the state of Connecticut moves forward with groundbreaking changes to our juvenile justice system, it is imperative that community-based agencies who offer an array of diversionary programs would be funded to increase our capacity to serve youth at-risk and keep them out of the court system entirely.

Programs like mentoring, youth employment and the juvenile review board are just a few examples of programs that we offer to help divert them from the costly (in more ways than dollars) justice system. Data shows that once youth enter the system, they are more prone to experience negative outcomes such as dropping out of school, substance abuse and further delinquent activity. Connecticut is on the brink of cutting edge reform and has led the way in the past in areas including Raise the Age and status offense reform. Stakeholders across the state have integrated the scientific data from brain development as well as mental health awareness campaigns through initiatives such as the CONNECT grant to attempt to help our kids at the front end of behaviors that signal underlying problems, rather than waiting until they are deeply embedded in the juvenile justice system.

Youth Service Bureaus, mandated by the state through PA 78-183 for the purpose of “evaluating, planning, coordinating and implementing services, including prevention and intervention programs for delinquent, pre-delinquent, pregnant, young parents and troubled youth,” remain centralized entities that are accessible and affordable, proven to help divert many children and youth from court involvement. As the budget process moves forward, we are asking that Youth Service Bureaus receive full funding so that we can continue to serve the hundreds of children that come through our doors, seeking help and hope for their future.

Built into the Youth Service Bureau structure is a matching grant provided by the (145 statewide) municipalities served by each agency. We are very concerned about the impact the governor's proposed budget might have with cuts to municipal aid which could devastate small agencies like ours.

Finally, I would ask that together as a state, we look at dollars saved with the juvenile justice reforms that are happening now. Elimination of truancy from the Family With Service Needs complaint form, the impending closure of the CT Juvenile Training School—two initiatives that will bring great savings to our state, however if we do not reinvest this money in community programs that seek to prevent and divert youth involvement in the system, we will find ourselves back in the same cycle of failing our kids and paying the price. On behalf of Youth Service Bureaus across the state, I am asking that full funding would be granted in this budget so that we can continue to function as we have, providing consistent service to Connecticut youth and families since 1978.